



Intergenerational fairness - a myth?!

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Intergenerational fairness could also be described as a deception manoeuvre or a construction. Often in Germany the argument of intergenerational fairness has been used by conservatives and neoliberals to justify the imposition of austerity policies. Measures such as the balanced budget provision “Schuldenbremse”, a fiscal policy element that was added to the German constitution in 2009, resulted in social immobility, inequality, precarity and isolation. It was introduced in order to save future generations from having to deal with major debts. We as young socialists however believe that no one stands to gain by stating or staging a conflict between the Millennials or Baby Boomers generation. The actual disagreement that there is, is a political one: there are those who are in favour of the free market, limited government and private ownership and those who fight for improving public services and investing in these for the sake of future generations.

In Germany’s public debate, the intergenerational conflict discourse was never (and only) about pensions. In my country, when we as young people are talking about intergenerational fairness, we refer to the most pressing issues of our time such as the urgency of bringing about climate justice, addressing the housing crisis and improving the quality of work.

All of these issues are interconnected. Precarious work and low wages for example, prevent people from being able to save up to afford a private insurance and this in turn results on a flexibilization of the labour market that does not only affect the older generations, but all of us. Let’s end the blame game among generations and fight for a society where we can discuss the real issues and not focus too much on how many people deposit in the social security system but if there are people who can afford to contribute more than others and consider other possible new sources of revenue.

In what concerns the climate debate, we can recognize a similar narrative being used that has individualism at its core as it has also become an issue of political choice. While neoliberals, conservatives and even the green parties promote the idea of individuals as agents of change that can solve the climate crisis, we should stop focusing on the ways in which past generations haven’t done more against climate change from happening. Why aren’t we demanding that the biggest polluters such as oil companies, the rising number of billionaires and the politics that acted in the interests of the market rather than of citizens, to be held responsible for their wrongdoings?

The question that has to be discussed is what we value as a society and what do we want to use our resources for. Is it the care of our elderly and sick, the education of our children or to keep on saving until we leave nothing but dead infrastructure such as damaged roads and schools as our legacy behind? Current role models are countries like New Zealand, Scotland or Iceland, all lead by women, by not only calling themselves well-being economy governments, but constructing their economic policies in a way that is no longer based on the growth of their countries GDP but on values such as gender equality, health of their citizens or sustainability.

Demanding equality for all generations must be the goal. To support those who struggle to find a job or are stuck in unpaid internships and those who are working still at a very old age, even though they have spent their whole life serving and enriching our society, because due to a low rent they cannot afford their apartment's rent. In order to do this what we need is an investment programme to help build more social housing, subsidize clean energy and transform our social security system in a way that we leave no one behind.

Those who demand that we need to keep the black zero to sustain intergenerational fairness are those who introduced the whole debate in the 2000s, when it was high fashion to believe in the magic of the market. However, with the current climate crisis conservatives, neoliberals and even comrades from our own parties have to finally accept that if we want to secure the lives of future generations we need to transform our economy by discussing and planning what and how to produce.

People expect from government that it supports them when they feel unprotected. The thousands of young people that were out on the streets this year, be it at the Fridays for Future marches to demand climate justice or the participants of the feminist strikes, they want us to deliver the system change but why should they believe in a party that they have only witnessed as the junior partner in a coalition led by conservatives? If we want to win back their trust, we have to show them how their future could look like in a society that puts the needs of the many first, that can protect their future not the profits of big companies and banks. We called to break with the current coalition that we are in currently, because there will be no progressive policies without us in the future, but currently there are none implemented because of us.

Suggested reading:

[FEPS – SPERI Study: Intergenerational fairness in post-crisis Europe: A comparative study](#)